

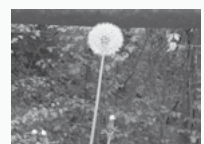
La Maison de mon Rêve: a conversation

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About dreams and imagination, the ambiguity of words and their use as an instrument of power; about how to handle narration as a grey zone activity and the importance of radical affection.

Raimundas Malašauskas (1973) is a Lithuanian curator and author. Raimundas has a distinctively reflexive approach to writing and curating, drawing from various modes of communication. He is concerned with the complexity of the world at large, its multiple meanings and the many (hi)stories it evokes.

Karin Karinna Bühler (1974) is a Swiss artist. Karin's work is characterised by her critical curiosity. She analyses our society and questions the way we deal with language, history and gender and is always on the lookout for hidden contexts that are highly effective beneath the surface of the apparent.



A WARM-UP

RM

Writing for me is excruciating, tedious and torturing. Most of the time.

Many writers would agree that it's a laborious and time-consuming process. Especially if you're not certain about something. You have to keep crafting the language. It all takes a lot of time. I sometimes apply a different method of writing where I try not to read what I'm writing which makes it easier. You're not going back all the time and rereading what you just wrote because that could become very time consuming. I always compare the continuous re-reading to what one is writing to weaving: You go back and forth and back and forth, infinitely weaving the same paragraph.

KB

Writing for me is very much associated with clarification. From time to time I write descriptions of works, concepts or essays. They give me the opportunity to think about what is important to me. Writing is therefore a process in which I find words for my own actions and for my interests. That sounds simple. But it's not. It's more like putting individual pieces of the puzzle together. Accordingly, the writing process is opaque, nebulous, rather chaotic at the beginning. Then I try to illuminate and clarify selected passages by writing about them. This can sometimes be very playful. And surely I love the feeling when puzzle pieces come together at the end and I have recognized something new.

RM

There are different sectors of writing I'm involved with. One of those sectors is articles that I get commissioned to write for an artist, for a catalogue, for a magazine. There's a specific intention, it has a specific tonality and point of focus on what you're focusing on that artist. In my case, I often would be invited to write about a work or an exhibition. My approach would be to place it within my own life experiences and write about this artwork as a tool to enhance and somehow transform your life flow, or simply as something that occurs there. And then there is a totally different way of writing which is making notes and some kind of diaries. I find that type of writing deeply aimed at some kind of experiences of actually producing life. By noting, recording, or even imagining and then documenting these experiences, you don't just create appearances, but you generate new forms of life that you are actively engaging with: you are creating the sensitivity and openness towards these experiences. I noticed a long time ago that writing a diary is akin to writing software for living life. I've always seen writing as similar to "writing a software" for experiencing life fully.

DREAMS

RM

Dreaming while sleeping is sort of an uncontrollable realm. That's what dreams are, no?

They consist of involuntary images and involuntary experiences. Dreams are those experiences that we don't really compose ourselves. They appear, occur, emerge involuntarily and out of control. So that's a very interesting aspect for me in terms of thinking about dreams. But in my own experience of dreaming, I find my

dreams quite simple, to be honest. They're quite figurative. Some of them are easy to describe. I have friends who would like to share their dreams – it's a bit like a club of dream-sharing. Some people send me their dreams. Some of the other people's dreams are really elaborate, with names and intellectual statements, with very peculiar plot construction full of twists and turns. Mine are much simpler in that respect. But quite symbolic of course.

KB

My dreams often have a fluid, sometimes surreal quality. Scenes can shift abruptly, and I might move seamlessly from one environment to another without logical transitions. Objects and characters might morph and change shape. So an individual dream is a deeply personal and varied phenomenon.

In a vivid dream, scenes and characters can appear almost lifelike, with rich, saturated hues and intricate textures. In my perception, a memory or recollection – likewise an imagination – can have a similar quality of appearance like a dream. Maybe they are a little paler than dreams.

RM

Two weeks ago, I gave a lecture in Vilnius entitled *Autopilot in secret*. Autopilot is most often seen as a form of management and control that happens without human involvement – at least that's the original meaning of the term when it comes to aviation. When I was preparing the lecture, I had a dream in which I visited the house of Clifford Irving. He was an American writer who became notorious in 1972 when Life Magazine featured his portrait on the cover, calling him the *command of the Year*. Irving was jailed because he falsely claimed to have obtained authorization from Howard Hughes – a multi-billionaire and one of the richest individuals in U.S. history. Hughes had become reclusive in his later years, which left the public knowing very little about him. Irving pretended to have Hughes's permission to write his autobiography or biography. The book had already been published or was about to be distributed to bookstores when the publisher received a phone call from Howard Hughes, who stated that he had never met this writer. So the whole thing turned out to be a hoax.

So in the dream, I'm sitting in the apartment of Clifford Irving in Berlin. I'm looking through the window. The view shows some grand imperial urban architecture. There's a building that is very symmetrical and imperial-looking. It reminds me of Moscow. Clifford Irving is showing me a play that he wrote recently. It's already somehow published in Greek language and some other languages like a bilingual edition. So he's showing me that play. And then I find out that he's restoring furniture. He's doing some kind of carpentry job. And there is a small stool with nicely encrusted pieces of pearl or amber in it. I realised that what's most important for me in this apartment, why I'm with him, is to get feedback about my lecture that I'm about to deliver.

KB

In a dream that I dreamed a few years ago – but is still very present – I'm falling. It's a free fall. So I'm lying horizontally in the air as if I were skydiving. Behind me is a small waterfall. On either side of me are narrow rock faces, black

and wet. Towards the front, the terrain opens up. There's a city, maybe St.Gallen. With this thought, I located the gorge in the *Mülenenschlucht*. In reality, however, this gorge would not work for a free fall at all. All the same. So I was still falling, and the moment of impact was getting closer. I expected to hit the ground soon. But then something changed in the air quality, in the consistency of the air. It was as if the air molecules were getting denser. Dense air prevented my impact. Finally, I landed very gently on my feet.

RM

When I woke up, Clifford didn't mention the lecture. But –as if caught in a loop of time– I think that his invitation to visit his apartment was actually his way of giving feedback on my lecture.

KB

I woke up with great astonishment.

Thinking about dreams one could make the distinction between an individual dream and a collective dream. For example Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous *I Have a Dream* speech. Delivered during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963, King's speech articulated a vision of a future where racial equality and justice prevail in America. At the same time, women in Switzerland dreamed of having the right to vote and to stand for election. This dream only became a reality in 1971. In Appenzell, the region in Switzerland where I come from, women were not allowed to vote at the cantonal level until 1990. Funny enough that Appenzell is also called Arcadia, Paradise – dreamlike life circumstances.

POWER OF IMAGINATION

RM

I remember once reading Henry Corbin – a scholar of Islamic mysticism on a specific ancient concept that was later adapted in Western philosophy – I believe it was called *Mundus imaginalis*. What struck me was that the practice of imagination was being seen not as production of fiction but simply as a sort of capacity to be in the world, to be with the world. Not to invent the world, but to keep perceiving it, experiencing it, sharing it. In this sense, imagination is at the core of state and experiencing the world. It's not about adding something that hasn't been there before. It comes from living and being as something that is very much shaped and empowered by some sort of imagination capacity. For me that was somehow quite important. Viewing imagination as a daily capacity for engaging with the world. And that actually makes you to be more involved with the world – not disassociated from it. Imagination can also be seen as a sort of capacity that creates a way of escape, a way of autonomous imagined worlds. But to me, it's more interesting to think of imagination as a capacity that allows you to be in the world. Deeper in it in a more complex way.

KB

The ability to create a vast empire just by imagining something fascinates me very much. The imagination makes it possible to locate oneself in a certain context and also to relativize one's own

importance. In the face of the universe, we are so vain. In order to demonstrate our nothingness, I invited an astrophysicist into an art gallery and asked him to describe the universe. Ben Moore, that's his name, then began to describe a journey from the earth to the edge of the universe. He packed his knowledge into pictorial descriptions. He described the limited visual perception of humans. For example, only a small segment of the light frequency is visible to our eyes. Therefore, other light frequencies are also used in astrophysics to look into the universe and draw conclusions from it. Following his descriptions, we perceived our body, the nature of the environment on Earth, and then the environment outside the Earth's atmosphere. Our own body was a rocket and was hurled into space. We pass the Earth's moon – with a look back at the Earth to see the insanely thin atmosphere which protects the earth – past some planets and their moons in our solar system into the Milky Way, our galaxy. If we had taken a different direction, we would not have passed any sights for years. There is just nothing. In our galaxy, we flew past insanely colourful nebulae and had to be careful not to be hit by a planet or meteorite. We then travelled on to our neighbouring galaxy, Andromeda, past it and on and on with a tremendous, unimaginable acceleration to the edge of the universe, or wherever today's knowledge reaches. When we finished the journey, I explained every single imagined universe as a sculpture. I gave those who wished a certificate for their *mental sculpture*. That was in 2010.

RM

Imagination is not the most frequent term in my daily discourse these days. I used the word imagination more frequently some time ago.

LATELY

KB

Lately, terms like *feminism* or *herstory* have been buzzing around in my head. With *herstory*, I wonder how history is written. Why is the women's perspective missing? How can this perspective be made visible? In general, I think a lot about social structures. I look at them as I would perceive an organism. Why and how does something work the way it does? Everything is related to each other and is interwoven. I want to understand the connections. I am not interested in the superficial, but much more in what is hidden behind the façade, the subtlety. I think that the invisible, the hidden influences us more in our everyday lives than the obvious.

RM

At some point, also years ago, I noticed that *intuition* became a word that was very much circulating in my thinking and in my exchanges with people. Then it went to the background and some other terms like *metaphor* were there. And now, maybe *living* is a core term that is circulating in my thinking and in exchanges. What is it to be living? How does it happen? How do you maintain a position in the world that allows you to feel truly alive and engaged in a way of living that makes life meaningful and fulfilling?



AMBIGUITY OF WORDS AND THEIR USE AS AN INSTRUMENT OF POWER

RM

I am thrilled by certain environments and situations that I can't fully understand. Not understanding them can be quite exciting for me. I don't mean to celebrate an awe-some kind of nonsense, but rather that not being able to understand makes those experiences more engaging for me. It's a bit like feeling lost. Then your ability to engage with the situation becomes more proactive. It's as if your faculties become more stimulated because you need to find your way, to make some kind of illusionary sense of whatever you are doing there. And that makes the experience perhaps more exciting. Excitement in life can sometimes also arise from the inability to understand what's going on.

KB

We speak English, your mother tongue is Lithuanian and mine is Swiss German. So we grew up with different languages and different cultural backgrounds. And if we really want to understand each other, we have to get involved with each other, learn from each other. I think language alone is not enough to avoid misunderstandings, because there are concepts behind language, concepts about the meaning of words that can be culturally different. You have to learn it just like the language itself. And then the translation from one language to the other is just as challenging.

RM

It's very hard to be certain that the use of words in a conversation between two people means the same for both of them. Often there is an illusion of understanding of each other – which is not bad. I mean, illusion can be very powerful. When both parties share a mutual sense of understanding, a common ground emerges—common actions, shared plans—despite potential differences in premises and interpretations of words. When there is this awesome sense of commonality, the conversation works.

KB

I find that words with multiple meanings are usually not that hard to debunk as such because they get their specific meaning from the context in which they are used. In contrast to artificial intelligence, we humans can recognize a context and thus interpret a sentence appropriately. Most of the time, at least.

RM

Sometimes I do find it important to verify and double-check whether my counterpart and I mean the same. Starting from very mundane matters like how to get from point A to point B. But then I also may ask: Is point A and point B the same for both of us?

KB

But then, ambiguity of words can also be used as a tool to enrich language, allowing for creativity, humour, and poetic expression. It can add depth through multiple layers of meaning.

RM

And ambiguity also can be entertaining. In certain aesthetic practices, artists rely on ambiguity. It's a more surrealistic approach where something can simultaneously be something else. We're sitting here in Brussels. I just think of René Magritte and his paintings. It's such a classic of ambiguity.

KB

Then language is used not only for communication but also for control, for influencing and manipulation, for strengthening power and authority. Many political leaders use words to tell the story of their country to their own liking, to define identity. In this case, the language is used to reinterpret historical events in the interest of strengthening nationalism or patriotism. Misinformation is also used very deliberately to shape public perception and suppress dissenting opinions.

RM

These days I do find it more important to clarify statements.

KB

With ambiguity comes vagueness. The lack of clarity can be used in a targeted manner to avoid direct confrontation. As a strategy, I sometimes find this clever, but most of the time vague wording makes me dissatisfied. It's as if a job has been done very poorly.

RM

Disambiguation in Wikipedia refers to the resolution of linguistic ambiguity. So I find it more important to assess certain premises, all certain possibilities of truth also. The truth of being and the truth of living. In that sense, we are ambiguous biological creatures that are living and dying at the same time. Our bodies are ageing. We maybe don't bother ourselves with this thinking that we are living and dying at the same time. And that's OK not to bother oneself with such thinking. It is already satisfying just to live without being too overwhelmed by the fact of death. To be alive is a big privilege.

KB

In fact, we know about the ambiguity of words and their strategic use, we know about the effects of fake news, propaganda or advertising. These premises led me to believe that words are an instrument of power. Therefore, words are powerful (and at the same time often not). However, I feel responsible for using carefully chosen words in my artistic practice, which is also associated with caring. And it is not only about a careful use of words but also about a critical way of reading. What is being communicated? By whom? With what motivation? Information literacy seems to me to be very important in these times.

RM

For my part, I feel the need to be more precise and careful with the use of words so that they don't appear as empty phrases used to possibly seduce someone or make them feel good. In reality, they are more like instruments of power rather than instruments of truth.

This could be an interesting subject: *Words as an instrument of power versus words as the instrument of truth.*

Of course, they are very connected.

NARRATION AS A GREY ZONE ACTIVITY

KB

For me, grey zone activity is the logical consequence, a response to the use of words as an instrument of power. It is a strategic use of storytelling, subtle and complex. The concept is often discussed in the context of hybrid warfare. It is

a powerful tool in modern geopolitics, which is about influencing information and perception. Those who exercise power or control over others and restrict their freedom or rights use information to influence, to manipulate. The intention is to achieve strategic goals without crossing the line into open conflict.

On the other hand, the oppressed also trade in grey area activities. If I were oppressed or censored, I would like to have a language to be able to communicate with like-minded people. So I would use or create tools to communicate something that I wouldn't be allowed to say out loud. My messages would then only be understandable to insiders.

RM

When I think of a specific Soviet lingo that evolved over decades within Soviet culture, it was primarily focused on defining and assigning singular meanings to certain words. Excluding and suspending the possibilities of multiple readings and multiple interpretations.

So the official Soviet lingo was very much about fixing the meaning, permanently. Official lingo therefore sounded wooden. There was this term, *wooden language*. It was totally inflexible, resistant to change and it sounded like wood when you knocked on it.

Its rigidity sometimes bordered on the comical. In the way Soviet officials spoke, the official formal way of addressing things was something that certain writers would take as their subject, like an object of subversion and critique. There was a way of using those rigid words with their fixed meanings and subverting them – not by adding something, but by emphasising the formal language to the point where it exceeded itself, transforming into something else entirely, not just another fixed meaning or discourse. It becomes almost absurd.

KB

I met a graphic designer in 2015 when I was in Istanbul at a workshop for typography and she was telling me about a font she was creating. As I understood, this font was designed to hide censored words, to undermine censorship. I suspect that she developed the font as a result of the Gezi Park protests in 2013. It was the last fierce protest against Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government. Since then, critical voices have been banned from the public sphere. But one wants to stay in exchange with like-minded people, no? So this type design was, or is, a grey zone activity itself.

RM

It's impossible not to think of new instances and new practices of censorship in contemporary Europe. Just think of Germany and the discourse around the war in Gaza.

IMPORTANCE OF RADICAL AFFECTION

KB

Radical affection refers to a deep, transformative type of love or care that challenges conventional boundaries or norms. So love and care drive actions aimed at systemic change. I ask myself: What am I radically affected by? What affects my life so much that I actively want to transform it?

RM

Yesterday I was watching a live feed of Ariana Reines, the poet. What stayed with me was her sentence (I am quoting from memory): 'I was expropriating my sorrow to make meaning that felt more important than healing at that point'. I kept thinking about the juxtaposition of *meaning* and *healing* in her words. The way I've read it was about the difference between the intellectual and literary construction of *meaning* and the more visceral, emotional, spiritual nature of *healing*.

KB

Thinking about it, I am radically affected by patriarchy. The influence of this system is deep and pervasive in my life, in the lives of us all, affecting many aspects of my personal, social, and professional existence. Most areas of our society are still predominantly made or influenced by men, who ignore women and their perspectives and thus deprive you of role models and fields of action. For this reason,

I think I attentively try to address gender issues in a private and artistic context and am involved in feminist initiatives such as running a feminist library or co-initiating the LeGENDERy Book Club. And then, being a mother radically affects me, too.

RM

I love how libraries and affection come together in your world. I would love to attend your LeGENDERy Book Club events. I often feel myself as a Soviet woman in a man's body – I had that realisation a few years ago and it opened up a new way of thinking about myself.

I grew up mostly with women around me, but of course, I played with boys and read books written by male authors mostly. A modest gesture to acknowledge and honour women's role in the way have been nurtured to become the human beings we are, was to publish three tales by Vytaute Zilinskaite – a woman writer in Lithuania who just passed away – as the core content of the catalogue of Lithuanian participation in Venice Biennale in 2013 (for the *oO* exhibition with Cyprus). I will send a copy to your club.

KB

The good thing is that experiencing radical affection can give you a profound sense of emotional fulfilment and purpose. When you are radically affected by someone or something, true love goes beyond superficial emotions and touches the very core of your being. Knowing that you are deeply loved and that you deeply love others can be incredibly motivating and sustaining. This deep transformative love then influences the decisions you make. It's then more likely you contribute positively to the community.

RM

It is more interesting to live with others than on one's own, for sure.

KB

Radical affection makes life worth living.

